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## A VACATION WITHIN A VACATION: CHILDREN'S DAY PROGRAMS AND PARENTAL SATISFACTION

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Family vacations are an important part of life for many families and may lead to beneficial outcomes for family members. Potential negative aspects of family vacations have also been identified, including the stress of increased time together. Many accommodation providers have developed children's day programs to help people negotiate these constraints. The purpose of this study was to explore how children's participation in day programs influenced the parents' experience on vacation. An open-ended questionnaire was e-mailed to parents whose children attended a children's program while on family vacations and a qualitative analysis was performed. The overall theme that emerged during this study is that parents' stressful experiences during family vacations can be moderated by participation in children's programs. Findings indicated that parents were very satisfied with the programs, children's participation in such programs provided opportunity for parental time alone, parents experienced positive emotions while their children were at the program, and the children's program served as an affordance that helped parents negotiate constraints they experienced during the family vacation. Future research needs to further explore these findings to better understand how to help commercial accommodation providers better serve families.

Key words: Affordances; Family holiday; Family recreation; Family tourism; Family vacation

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### Introduction

Vacations accompanied by family members have been an important part of leisure behavior since the 19th century. Rugh (2008) stated that vacations were historically taken to relieve stress and escape from daily duties. In the contemporary world many

people experience high stress levels and increased personal demands. In attempting to accommodate the maximum number of activities, they constantly feel rushed (Goodale & Godbey, 1988). Family vacations are one way to escape that constant cycle of time scarcity because while on vacation, families may relax and avoid worrying about established

schedules (Goodale & Godbey, 1988). Vacations can, however, be stressful for parents. Families often opt for travel destinations where services are provided and which offer an opportunity to reduce the amount of work. Many resorts, cruise lines, and other accommodation providers offer special programs to help family members have enjoyable vacation experiences. One such program is a “kids club” style children’s program. The present study explored how children’s programs influence parents’ experiences on family vacations.

One of the largest sectors of the tourism industry is composed of families traveling with children (Schänzel & Smith, 2014). Although this is one of the “largest and most constant markets for the tourism and leisure industry” (Schänzel & Smith, 2014, p. 127), it is often neglected by leisure and tourism researchers (Carr, 2006; Obrador, 2012). The literature review presents research related to the benefits and negative aspects of family travel, leisure constraints in the tourism context, and one possible affordance that may help families negotiate constraints.

## Literature Review

### *Benefits of Family Vacations*

Researchers have identified various benefits families may receive from family vacations. One of these benefits is family togetherness. Rugh (2008) stated that family vacations are seen as a way to promote family togetherness and are an opportunity for families to have novel experiences together. When families are at home, family members have various schedules and often do not see each other because of work, school, or other activities. But on family vacations, the individual family members are able to enjoy each other’s company for an extended period of time (Löfgren, 1999). Havitz, Shaw, and Delamere (2010) stated that family vacations provide an opportunity for parent–child interaction (these researchers focused on fathers but the same applies to mothers). On vacations, typical routines are abandoned and parents and children can spend all day together (Havitz et al., 2010). Additionally, Robinson (2008) stated that the family vacation is an important tool to bring family members together and to foster family functioning.

Illustrating the relationship of family vacations fostering family functioning, Lehto, Choi, Lin, and MacDermid (2009) explored the relationship between family travel, family cohesion, and family communication. They found a positive relationship between family vacation, family bonding, communication, and solidarity. The authors also indicated that one explanation for this relationship is the changes in interaction styles that occur in families while on vacation. These findings support those of Schänzel, Smith, and Weaver (2005), who discussed the tangible and intangible benefits of family vacations, including social interactions and relationships.

Another benefit of family vacations is unstructured time. Rosenfeld (2006) stated that many children today have no time for themselves. They are engaged in so many activities outside of school that their entire day is structured. By being allowed unstructured playtime, children find new skills, have a chance to be creative, and can explore the world, while on family vacations, children have the opportunity to experience structured activities (Gaines, Hubbard, Witte, & O’Neill, 2004), as well as unstructured time (Rosenfeld, 2006). When routines and typical family duties are abandoned on vacation, family members get to know each other in different ways and discover new skills and abilities.

A third benefit of family vacations is educational opportunities. Löfgren (1999) argued that many families travel to show their children something new. He stated that travel is “one of the most important elements in the education of the young” (p. 267). Small (2005) also noted that family holidays provide benefits including education for children. Learning experiences on vacations provide families with opportunities to learn about each other and to learn about traditions of the region where they are traveling. These learning experiences can be applied to daily life once the family returns home.

### *Negative Aspects of Family Vacations*

In addition to the many possible benefits of family vacations, several potentially negative aspects exist. For example, family travel has been associated with stress (Gram, 2005; Schänzel, Yeoman, & Backer, 2012). Some researchers have discussed that the family member typically most negatively affected

is the mother. Löfgren (1999) pointed out that family vacations are often hard work for mothers, which was later discussed by Small (2005). This work includes planning and facilitating the vacation, as well as cleaning up afterward. According to Nanda, Hu, and Bai (2006) women decide where, when, and how the family should vacation, plan the itinerary of the vacation, and do much of the daily maintenance while on vacation. If the vacation does not live up to family members' expectations, mothers are often blamed for the negative experience. Trussell and Shaw (2007) noted that family activities are often experienced as work for mothers rather than leisure. Their findings indicated that the organization of travel is physically and emotionally exhausting for women, especially if the experience was negative. The same authors also indicated that mothers were often frustrated and disappointed because all of the work, stress, and time they invested in planning a vacation was not worth the effort if the family did not have a positive experience.

Another common negative aspect of family vacations is family conflict. Increased time together and new experiences have the potential to create conflict and tension among family members (Gram, 2005). Rugh (2008) stated that the advantages of being together for extended periods of time often turned into a conflict. She described that in many family vacations there was no privacy and claimed that the fatigue, stress, and work put too much pressure on even the healthiest marriage: "The couple who travel are sitting on top of each other most of the time, and this is bound to produce tensions" (p. 179).

A third negative aspect of family vacations is different interests of family members. Carr (2006) described how adolescents and parents typically seek different types of tourism experiences. Combining the needs and interests of various family members can be challenging (Gram, 2005). Rugh (2008) stated that it was often very hard to find a destination and an activity that was interesting for all family members. Many times this did not fit with the interest of the children at all, which led to them being bored. Löfgren (1999) noted that many vacation destinations do not live up to the family members' expectations, which leads to certain members being disappointed.

These difficulties, as well as others that families experience during family travel can be better

understood through the framework of leisure constraints theory. This theory also provides insight into how families can negotiate constraints to be able to experience the numerous potential benefits of family vacations.

### *Leisure Constraints Theory*

Leisure constraints research investigates "factors that are assumed by researchers and/or perceived or experienced by individuals to limit the formation of leisure preferences and/or to inhibit or prohibit participation and enjoyment in leisure" (Jackson, 2000, p. 62). Crawford and Godbey (1987) classified leisure constraints into three categories: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. As stated by Jackson, Crawford, and Godbey (1993), leisure constraints were previously considered as barriers to participation. Constraints were seen as something that could not be overcome and that kept the participant from engaging in a leisure activity. Scott (2005) argued that constraints were factors that could limit a person from participating in an activity. Only if the person was able to successfully negotiate the constraint that kept him/her from participating could enjoyment occur.

In contrast to the research that claimed barriers to participation could not be overcome, Jackson (2000) pointed out that constraints are negotiable. Jackson et al. (1993) stated that people negotiate constraints in a variety of ways. Motivation and the importance of the leisure activity to the person played an important role in determining if the task was successfully completed. If the person thought that the leisure activity was likely to be beneficial then the successful negotiation became more important. For example, if a parent believes that a resort vacation would be beneficial to the family members then the financial constraints are negotiated in order for the family to have a positive vacation experience.

Leisure constraints theory has been explored in the context of travel and tourism. Nyaupane and Andereck (2008) utilized leisure constraints theory (Crawford and Godbey's constraints classification) to understand the constraints experience by senior travelers. They identified three dimensions within the structural constraints construct, namely: place attributes, lack of time, and lack of money.



Nyaupane and Andereck (2008) suggested that accommodation providers may be able to help families negotiate constraints by understanding factors that inhibited their enjoyment of travel experiences or constrained their travel.

A key to negotiating constraints is the idea of leisure affordances. Leisure affordances are characteristics of the environment, both physical and social, that make leisure participation and enjoyment possible (Greeno, 1994). Leisure affordances can be created by individuals or by those seeking to provide experiences for them. Kleiber, Wade, and Loucks-Atkinson (2005) described how leisure providers can manipulate the environment (as park engineers, Disney World managers, and adaptive equipment designers do) to create a broader range of opportunities for participation and enjoyment for people. Many accommodation providers have identified a need to help families negotiate constraints, and often accomplish this by programming activities and opportunities for them.

#### *Children's Programs at Travel Destinations*

Today, many families choose to spend their vacations at a destination that creates affordances to help them negotiate constraints of family travel, such as resorts or cruises. Gaines et al. (2004) stated that in recent years the demand for child services within family travel has increased and that although parents want to spend time with their children while on vacation [which Schänzel (2013) described as family time on holiday], they also want to spend time alone (which Schänzel termed own time on holiday). Consequently children's programs at travel destinations have become more popular.

Many accommodation providers have realized this need and created programs that satisfy the needs of both children and parents. By helping families negotiate constraints, accommodation providers can help family members have a positive vacation experience. Many resort owners established children's programs because they found that these led to increased customer satisfaction. The enjoyable experiences being provided led to closer family bonds and increased satisfaction with the vacation experience (Gaines et al., 2004).

Although family vacations offer many potential benefits, family members also often experience

difficulties due to various constraints while on vacation. Many accommodation providers offer children's programs to help families negotiate constraints and have more enjoyable vacation experiences. No research has been conducted, however, exploring the elements of a successful children's program and the potential influence that participating in such programs may have on family members. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how participation of children in a day program during family vacation influenced parents' vacation experience.

## Methods

### *Description of Research Participants and Setting*

The sample for this study consisted of 21 parents whose child(ren) participated at a children's program while on family vacation. Seventeen participants were female and four participants were male. The average age of the participants was 43.5 years. The ethnicities of the participants were as follows: Caucasian (16), African-American (2), Asian (1), and Hispanic (1); one participant did not indicate their ethnicity. Three of the participants were single parents, and the remaining 18 were married.

Participants were recruited from two different cruise lines. One cruise line offered programs for children between the ages of 3 and 17. Activities were adapted so that they were age appropriate and included snorkeling, a water park, swimming with dolphins, making a stuffed animal, working in the earth and pottery studio, and visiting the dance club after dark. The second cruise line offered programs for children between the ages of 5 and 17. All activities were designed to meet the needs of each age group and included activities such as sports, eating dinner together, outdoor movies, video games, dance parties, karaoke, scavenger hunt, and pool parties.

### *Data Collection Techniques*

Participants were recruited through online travel communities. The researchers solicited information from parents who met the requirements of the study (that they were parents of children who had participated in a day program while on vacation). Once they agreed to participate, the researchers e-mailed

them the questionnaire with the instructions to fill it out and e-mail it back to the researchers. After the researchers received the completed questionnaires, follow-up questions were used to ensure that the researchers interpreted the answers of the participants correctly. As suggested by Henderson (2006), the computer-mediated data collection technique was chosen to overcome distance and travel issues that constrained the researchers as well as the participants. Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2008), and Coderre, Mathieu, and St. Laurent (2004) discussed the benefits of e-mail-based data collection. Based on their recommendations, this technique was selected for the current study.

### *Instrumentation*

The questionnaire consisted of 15 open-ended questions that were developed by the researchers with the assistance of a panel of experts, composed of faculty members and researchers in the fields of tourism, recreation management, and family recreation. The questions addressed parents' perspectives on the children's participation in the day program and the influence of such participation on the parents' vacation experience. The open-ended nature of the questions allowed the parents to respond in detail, giving the researchers a deeper view of the experience the parents had while on vacation. The parents also provided demographic information regarding age and gender of all family members and family structure.

### *Data Analysis Techniques*

To analyze the qualitative data, inductive analysis and a constant comparative method were used (Henderson, 2006). The researchers examined the participants' answers thoroughly, and developed a list of topics that emerged from the data. As recommended by Merriam (2009), open coding was used to identify the key concepts (topics). By naming and grouping related concepts, the researchers were able to develop categories. Axial coding was used to relate the categories to their subcategories and to explore relationships between the subcategories. Through selective coding and category reduction, the researchers were able to establish that the categories satisfied the data (Merriam, 2009). The

categories were then grouped into themes. Data saturation was assessed when no new topics, categories, or themes emerged from the data.

The researchers took steps to establish the credibility and trustworthiness of the study. The researchers conducted member checks (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Preliminary results were shared with participants to verify if conclusions represented their experience (Henderson, 2006). An external auditor reviewed research notes and selected portions of the data, and also checked the formulation of topics, categories, and themes to ensure that they were based in the data. An audit trail was kept of all correspondence with participants (Henderson, 2006).

### *Results*

The following overall theme emerged from the data: children's programs provide parents with affordances that reduce stress experienced during family vacations, and therefore help the parents enjoy the vacation. The overall theme was derived from four main themes that emerged from the data. Additionally, several subthemes contributed to the development of the main themes. Themes and subthemes are described below.

#### *Parents Enjoyed Time to Themselves While Children Participated in the Program*

During their time apart from their children the parents engaged in the following activities: (a) time away from children, (b) adult-only activities, and (c) relaxation. Each of these will be described below in more detail.

*Time Away From Children.* All parents stated that some time to themselves was important to them. Two of the parents were single mothers. Each of them indicated that it was important to them that the children's program existed because, as one participant stated, "the kids had fun in the program and I was still able to have some 'me time' at the spa and slides." The other single mother described that "I would read, eat dinner by myself, attend the adult only comedy shows, or the productions in the theater."

It was also important to married couples to have time on their own because they could participate in the onboard activities such as going to the spa or gym, getting a massage, using the slides, playing bingo, or laying by the pool. One participant stated, "When both children were in the program we attended shows, ate at the nicer restaurant, and sometimes just relaxed on our balcony." Although participants described a wide variety of activities that they engaged in while apart from their children, almost all indicated that they "ate a nice dinner with my spouse."

*Adult-Only Activities.* Many participants stated that while the children were at the program, they "enjoyed the adults-only area," went to "adult activities such as trivia, bingo, the pool, casino," or "explored the surroundings." One participant stated that she and her husband went off the ship to take an excursion while the children stayed on board at the program, in addition to other activities: "We took a day excursion that was adult only, hung out by the pool, participated in some of the adult activities, went to shows, and occasionally had a quiet dinner. All of this knowing that the kids were having a great time." Another participant stated, "At night we were able to enjoy some beverages and gambling."

*Relaxation.* While the activities mentioned above played a role in the relaxation of the parents, some of them stated specifically that they "relaxed." Parents stated that they "slept in the sun," "read a book," "napped in the stateroom," "hung out at the Lido deck," or spent some "alone time in the room." The parents indicated that these relaxation techniques helped them to enjoy their time away from work and to escape the stress of their daily routine. Furthermore, the parents stated that once the children returned from the program they were refreshed and happy to spend time together as a family.

#### *Most Parents Experienced Positive Emotions While Their Children Were at the Program*

The researchers were interested in how the parents felt when dropping their children off at the program or while their children were at the day

program. Parents reported more positive than negative feelings. Parents described the following positive emotions: (a) comfortable, (b) free from worry, (c) happy, and (d) excited. The emotions of the parents will be described in more detail below.

*Comfortable.* One commonly described emotion was feeling comfortable or at ease. One participant stated that, "we were very comfortable with the program and the staff, so we felt very relaxed and happy that they were having fun at the same time we were." Another parent stated that she felt "comfortable and safe" when thinking about her child participating in the program.

*Free From Worry.* Another participant who had three children participating in the children's program stated, "I felt they were safe and having a good time, therefore I could have a good time. And if there was a problem they would notify us so we could come and get them." Another parent stated that "the activities were well staffed, supervised, and secure, so we felt confident having them in the program." Some parents did not worry about their children while at the program. One participant said, "I didn't have any worries about the programs. I was just concerned that the boys weren't getting into trouble or annoying other passengers. We would make them check in with us periodically." Another parent stated that, "We had no negative emotions about his participating in the programs. We told him in general where he could find us. We also instituted a note pad and pencil which we hung on our mailbox outside our cabin door. We could easily communicate where to find each other."

*Happy.* Several parents reported feeling happy while their children participated in the program. One participant stated, "I felt happy; I want her to have a good time, too. I felt like having time away from me helps to instill independence." Another parent stated that she felt "glad they were having fun in a supervised environment and making friends their own ages."

*Excited.* The excitement of having alone time was identified by several participants. One parent



said she "felt excitement for grownup time." There was, however, one day that her child did not want to stay at the program and started crying as she dropped her off. The participant stated that she felt guilt in that moment. After a while she came back and checked on the child and saw that she was having fun. Therefore, the parent returned to the activity she had chosen for that day and was excited about some alone time.

### *Program Elements Created a Positive Experience for Children*

Findings indicated that parents were generally satisfied with the children's programs. The participants described the following components of the programs as contributing to easing their worry: (a) staff and peer friendships, (b) supervision, (c) organization, and (d) age-appropriate activities. Each of these sub-themes is described below.

*Staff and Peer Friendships.* Parents described the positive influence of staff members and valued new peer friendships for their children. One parent described the experience of her children as follows: "They absolutely loved the programs. They enjoyed meeting other children their age. They also enjoyed going to dance parties and not feeling like they were stuck with parents." Another parent expressed the good time the children had at the program: "They wanted to go there even when we had plans with them!! They made new friends so they wanted to keep going back." In addition to peers, parents described the positive role of staff in facilitating enjoyable experiences for children. The staff played games with the children, supervised them, and created a personal relationship that the children enjoyed. One parent stated that the children "enjoyed the interaction with the workers." Another parent described how his child loved being at the day program: "my daughter loved face painting and some days she ate supper with the other kids and camp staff."

*Supervision.* Parents felt like their children were well supervised while they attended the program. Some of the experiences that were described included the fact that the children were signed in

at drop off and signed out when they got picked up or left for the day. Consequently, while the children participated in the program the parents had a feeling of freedom without having to worry about their child. For example, one parent reported, "I wanted a place where I could feel comfortable leaving my child, if I wanted to do something on my own."

Another parent stated that their family chose the accommodation provider based on the availability of a children's program. The parents wanted to ensure that their child could meet other children and the parents could have some alone time. She stated, "One of the reasons we chose [this cruise line] was because of past experiences with our daughter. We knew that she would be well supervised, but would have a great time and make friends."

*Organization.* The programs provided the children with some freedom, but also provided many organized activities. The activities were geared toward each age group and included face painting, sport activities, scavenger hunts, dance parties, video and computer games, and a going away party. The older the children were, the less structured the activities became. For example, one parent stated that, "the older kids did organized activities about 2 hours a day but hung out in the kids' club several hours more each day." The organization of the activities was also a factor in selecting a cruise as the vacation destination. One parent described the program in the following way: "we chose [this cruise line] because we had heard they had a great kids program that was very organized."

*Age-Appropriate Activities.* At each of the programs, children were placed in groups based on their age. Because of this organization, age-appropriate activities were provided for each child. One participant stated, "The girls loved going to the camp! They had other children to interact with and do activities that were more geared for them on a vacation that is geared more towards adults." As one mother stated about her older son's participation, "He loves the program and looks forward to them each cruise (yearly). He likes having his own schedule of which he can pick and choose the programs. He enjoys the freedom of coming and going at his own choosing."



Another parent stated, "The older ones enjoyed the scavenger hunts and some of the activities like mini-golf, ping pong tournament, and karaoke." One mother, whose son has Asperger's Syndrome and who also has a 2 year old, stated that "it is difficult to get him involved sometimes and trying to keep a 2 year old entertained can be a challenge." But the children's program offered "things like scavenger hunts [that] are goal oriented so it was easier for our son to participate." In general, parents expressed confidence that their children were engaged in activities they were able to participate in and enjoy, regardless of their age.

#### *Affordances Were Created That Helped Parents Negotiate Constraints of Family Vacations*

To explore constraints and affordances for family travel, parents were asked to describe difficulties with family vacations and how the accommodation provider assisted in those areas. The challenges that were encountered by the parents and were made easier through the children's program were: (a) togetherness tension, (b) rushed family activities, and (c) finding enjoyable activities for each family member. Each of these subthemes will be described in detail below.

*Togetherness Tension.* Some parents stated that it is a challenge for them to be together all of the time while on vacation. During their regular schedule the parents go to work and the children go to school, which provides each family member with some time apart. But on family vacations the family is together all of the time. One parent described that it is difficult "being confined in a little space with the kids screaming, arguing, and fighting (being typical brothers)." This was the most difficult challenge of family vacations for this parent. A father stated, "Several of the resorts we traveled to around the world were not as accommodating as [this cruise line]. They did not have a kid's facility like [this cruise line] has. It made it difficult for my wife and I to have alone time."

One mother stated that the difficulties with family travel are "mostly just being with each other all the time, trying to do things for her (daughter) and for us." Most of the participants stated that the

children's program helped them negotiate the constraint of too much togetherness by providing them with some alone time while their children were supervised and engaged in enjoyable activities.

*Rushed Family Activities.* On family vacations many families want to relax but also want new experiences or to learn about the area they are visiting. There is typically more to see and do than families have time for while on vacation. One parent described the stress of "trying to see it all or do it all while trying to maintain healthy and routine sleep and eating patterns." Another participant stated that mealtimes are the biggest challenge for her family, and described how the accommodation provider created an affordance to help them negotiate this constraint: "The variety of options on the cruise was great. The youngest sometimes ate with the kids program, but the older girls enjoyed eating in the dining room with us before heading out with friends. Much easier than trying to cook or pick a restaurant everyone likes in a regular vacation."

*Finding Enjoyable Activities for Each Family Member.* Many parents described the difficulty in finding activities all family members would enjoy. Often family members have different interests or abilities, and this presents a challenge when selecting family activities on vacation. One parent stated that "finding activities that the whole family can do together" is generally difficult on vacations. One of the single mothers stated that, "the difficulty is sometimes finding things that the kids can do and enjoy while I participate in adult activities the resort has to offer." Another participant stated that it is not only difficult to find activities but to "find something age appropriate." One parent described their experience as follows: "My children always want to eat and get very restless easy. So to just go sightseeing can be challenging because they would be bored when we want to be seeing the sights." She also stated, "One of them (the youngest) is very vocal about her feelings. It can be very challenging trying to relax and enjoy things when this happens." As with the other challenges, all parents stated that the children's program helped them negotiate these constraints.

### Discussion and Implications

This study provides insight into the influence of children's programs on parents' vacation experience. As empirical research has been largely absent in previous writings on family vacations, the findings of this study contribute to this underresearched area. Previous literature does not address how children's programs influence family vacations. Positive and negative aspects of family vacations are described but none of the existing research describes how children's programs can help in negotiating these constraints. The findings of this study indicate that children's programs may contribute to parental satisfaction on family vacations. Such programs provide parents with the affordances to negotiate constraints while at the same time providing children with an enjoyable experience that meets their needs. Overall, children's programs appear to help reduce stress experienced on family vacations and to address the needs of each family member. Study findings support previous research but also raise new questions that should be addressed in future research.

### *Parental Satisfaction*

Participants indicated that their children's participation in the day programs contributed to greater satisfaction with the vacation for all family members. They provided further insight into their satisfaction by describing program details and positive outcomes that enhanced their experiences. J. R. Agate, Zabriskie, Agate, and Poff (2009) suggested that satisfaction with some forms of family leisure are highly correlated with overall satisfaction with family life; this positive vacation experience may consequently improve satisfaction with family life.

Family vacations have undergone a profound change in recent years (Nickerson & Jurowski, 2001). The travel industry responded to that change by marketing toward families and children. Many family destinations developed children's programs similar to those described in this study. In order for children's programs to remain successful they need to market to families (S. T. Agate, Williams, & Barrett, 2011). Recent research has indicated that children are becoming more involved in decision making related to family travel (Bronner & de Hoog, 2008; Gram, 2011). As described by Gram (2007), the

children's influence on vacation decisions should be considered by accommodation providers in making marketing plans. Advertising children's programs to both parents and children may help more families become aware of the potential benefit offered through participation in these programs. Furthermore, accommodation providers that do not have children's programs may benefit from developing an affordable program that will help satisfy travelers' needs. In addition to children's programs, it is important for accommodation providers to give attention to the needs and desires of adolescents—both individually and as part of a family (Carr, 2006). This may help parents and children (including adolescents) to have more enjoyable family vacation experiences.

### *Children's Programs Providing Leisure Affordances*

Rugh (2008) stated that it was difficult to find activities and destinations that all family members would enjoy. She noted that one of the potential conflicts during family vacations was often that children felt bored. Therefore, planning a vacation that was interesting to every family member was a difficult task. The last finding of this study was that affordances were created that helped parents negotiate constraints of family vacations. Participants described the difficulties of worrying about entertaining the children, organizing family activities, or trying to find activities that satisfy the whole family. Many people participate in an activity although they are experiencing constraints (Scott, 2005). Although participants indicated typical challenges on previous family vacations, the children's program provided them with affordances that helped them negotiate constraints, consequently helping them have enjoyable vacation experiences (both as a family and individually).

Participants also indicated that it was difficult to satisfy all family members. Stevenson-Hinde (1990) stated that none of the family members can be understood in isolation. In order for the whole system to be satisfied with a vacation each individual of the system must be satisfied (Steinglass, 1987). The children's program, therefore, plays an important part in reaching this goal. By providing the children with enjoyable activities and positive

experiences it contributed to a positive vacation experience. If the children are happy and satisfied, the parents can relax and also be satisfied with the vacation experience. This finding supports the findings of S. T. Agate and Williams (2013) that mothers' enjoyment is contingent on the enjoyment of other family members. This illustrates the ethic of care that influences many women's experience of life and leisure (Gilligan, 1982). Facilitating enjoyable children's experiences consequently facilitates enjoyable parental experiences.

### *Balancing Family Time and Own Time*

One of the challenges of family vacations is balancing the amount of family togetherness. Schänzel and Smith (2014) described that, "family time is based on the ideal of harmonious family togetherness whereas own time represents more the reality of needing freedom from family commitments" (p. 132). Participants in the current study reported that, although they enjoyed the opportunity to be with their children on vacation, they also wanted to be able to enjoy some time by themselves, with their spouse, or just to relax. Findings indicated that the children's program helped them negotiate the constraints to having time on their own while on family vacation. The parents were able to have some time to themselves while the children were at the program. This desire for time away from children supports Small's (2005) research that emphasized the value that mothers place on having time free from care-giving responsibilities. The children's programs on the cruises helped facilitate this balance of family time and own time, as described by Gram (2005) and Schänzel and Smith (2014), which contributed to an enjoyable family vacation experience for the family members.

### *Caregivers' Experience in a Changing Market*

Participants expressed positive emotions about leaving their children at the day program. They described feeling comfortable, confident, and happy with the decision to have their children participate in the program. This was especially important for single parents because it was their only way to have alone time. Gardyn (2001) pointed out that the travel market has become increasingly diverse.

There has been an increase in single parents traveling with their children and multigenerational travel in which aging travelers accompany their grandchildren on vacations. It is, therefore, important that the travel industry embraces these changes and offers programs that help parents (or grandparents or other guardians) to have an enjoyable vacation.

Although most parents in the current study had positive feelings about the program, there were some parents that had mixed feelings about leaving their children. These mixed feelings had less to do with the quality of the program and more with parental anxieties. Some of the negative emotions described by the parents included "hesitant at first," "a little anxiety," and feeling concerned, uneasy, or afraid. For some parents it was difficult to have their children participate in the day program. However, several parents stated that the hesitation went away after the child participated for the first day. One mother stated, "Emotionally we were a little hesitant but after seeing the club, we were comfortable." Another parent stated that seeing the children's positive experience made it "not as hard the next time we did it." Therefore, the positive appearance of the club and the positive experiences of the children helped alleviate parental fears and anxieties.

### *Limitations and Future Research*

While these findings are significant and contribute to family vacation research, there are limitations that can be addressed in future research. One limitation of this study was that only vacationers from two accommodation providers were interviewed. It would be useful in future studies to recruit participants from several accommodation providers. Another limitation of this study, which is also a limitation of family research in general, is that 80% of the participants were mothers. The prevalence of mothers responding may have to do with the role mothers often take of being the family manager (S. T. Agate & Williams, 2013). Future studies will benefit from interviewing fathers, as suggested by Schänzel and Smith (2011). Such findings could then be compared with the answers given by mothers in this study.

Another beneficial future study would be to interview children who participated in the children's programs. Exploring children's lived experience



adds further depth to the exploration of family travel (Hilbrecht, Shaw, Delamere, & Havitz, 2008). This would provide a more complete view of family members' experience and address Schänzel's (2010) call for a whole-family approach in tourism research. This means moving beyond the one-dimensional or two-dimensional (individual or dyadic) perspectives to include perspectives from mother, father, and children. According to Schänzel, this method would provide greater insight into gender and generational differences, and group dynamics in family tourism. Additionally, considering the changing family composition, it might also be beneficial to study grandparents, extended family caregivers, single-parent families, and other family structures. This is critical at a time when the demography of family travel is rapidly changing (Schänzel & Yeoman, 2015).

Findings of the current study indicated that children's programs help reduce parental stress experienced during family vacations. These programs help parents to enjoy their time while on vacation, provide them with time to themselves, and help families to negotiate constraints they often experience on vacations. These findings add to an emerging body of literature exploring family travel. Results have implications for those seeking to facilitate enjoyable family vacation experiences as well as researchers who are exploring vacations and their contribution to enhancing quality of life.

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